



LINCOLN LORE

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LINCOLN'S MANUAL FOR LAWYERS

Abraham Lincoln on one occasion prepared some notes for a lecture on law. In the introductory words of the manuscript he said: "I find quite as much material for a lecture in those points wherein I have failed, as in those wherein I have been moderately successful." From these notes and other original writings of the Illinois lawyer, the following excerpts have been compiled:

The case cannot be gained by much talking.

Practice proves more than theory, in any case.

The severest justice may not always be the best policy.

I am for it unless there be some valid reason against it.

Right or wrong I assumed this ground and I now avow it.

Every particular case will have its modifying circumstances.

He never lets the logic of principle displace the logic of success.

You must remember some things legally right are not morally right.

Any effort to put enmity between you and me, is as idle as the wind.

Never stir up litigation. A worse man can scarcely be found than one who does this.

I would not offer her or any wife a temptation to a permanent separation from her husband.

It can't be argued up and it can't be argued down. Let it alone and it will go down of itself.

Always bear in mind that your resolution to succeed is more important than any one thing.

When you lack interest in the case the job will very likely lack skill and diligence in performance.

Extemporaneous speaking should be practiced and cultivated. It is the lawyer's avenue to the public.

A jury too frequently has at least one member more ready to hang the panel than to hang the traitor.

If you are resolutely determined to make a lawyer of yourself the thing is more than half done already.

In law it is good policy never to plead what you need not, lest you oblige yourself to prove what you cannot.

One who is sworn to "take care that the laws are faithfully executed" should not himself be one to violate them.

Look over it carefully, and conclude I meant all I said, and did not mean anything I did not say, and you will have my meaning.

I must study the plain physical facts of the case, ascertain what is possible, and learn what appears to be right and wise.

If any one, upon his rare powers of speaking shall claim an exemption from the drudgery of the law, his case is a failure in advance.

I could have got a judgment against Tarley, if I had pressed to the utmost; but I am really sorry for him—poor and a cripple as he is.

The leading rule for the lawyer, as for the man of every other calling, is diligence. Leave nothing for tomorrow which can be done today.

Resolve to be honest at all events; and if in your own judgment you cannot be an honest lawyer, resolve to be honest without being a lawyer.

Let every man remember that to violate the law is to trample on the blood of his father, and to tear the charter of his own and his children's liberty.

I don't want to quarrel with him—to call him a liar—but when I come square up to him I don't know what else to call him, if I must tell the truth out.

If a man will stand up and repeat and reassert that two and two do not make four, I know nothing in the power of argument that can stop him.

The matter of fees is important, far beyond the mere question of bread and butter involved. Properly attended to, fuller justice is done to both lawyer and client.

I suppose I cannot reasonably hope to convince you that we have any principles. The most I can expect is to assure you that we think we have, and are quite contented with them.

It is a small matter whether you read (law) with anybody or not . . . get the books and read them till you understand them, in their principal features, that is the main thing.

We better know there is a fire whence we see much smoke rising than we could know it by one or two witnesses swearing to it. The witness may commit perjury but the smoke cannot.

When a man hears himself somewhat misrepresented, it provokes him—at least, I find it so with myself; but when misrepresentation becomes very gross and palpable, it is more apt to amuse him.

It's a lie, and not a well told one at that. It grins out like a copper dollar . . . as for getting a good, bright passable lie out of him, you might as well try to strike fire from a cake of tallow.

The true rule, in determining to embrace or reject anything is not whether it have any evil in it, but whether it have more of evil than of good. There are few things wholly evil or wholly good.

Discourage litigation. Persuade your neighbor to compromise whenever you can . . . As a peacemaker the lawyer has a superior opportunity of being a good man. There will still be business enough.

If you wish to be a lawyer, attach no consequence to the place you are in, or the person you are with; but get books, sit down anywhere, and go to reading for yourself. That will make a lawyer of you quicker than any other way.

In one faculty, at least, there can be no dispute of the gentleman's superiority over me, and most other men: and that is, the faculty of entangling a subject so that neither himself, nor any other man can find head or tail to it.

There are two ways of establishing a proposition. One is by trying to demonstrate it upon reason, and the other is, to show that great men in former times have thought so and so, and thus to pass it by the weight of pure authority.

I have sometimes seen a good lawyer, struggling for his client's neck in a desperate case, employing every artifice to work round, befog and cover up with many words some point arising in the case which he dared not admit and yet could not deny.

The best mode of obtaining a thorough knowledge of the law, is very simple, though laborious and tedious. It is only to get the books and read and study them carefully. Begin with Blackstone's "Commentaries," and after reading it carefully through, say twice, take up Chitty's "Pleadings," Greenleaf's "Evidence," and Story's "Equity," etc., in succession. Work, work, work, is the main thing.